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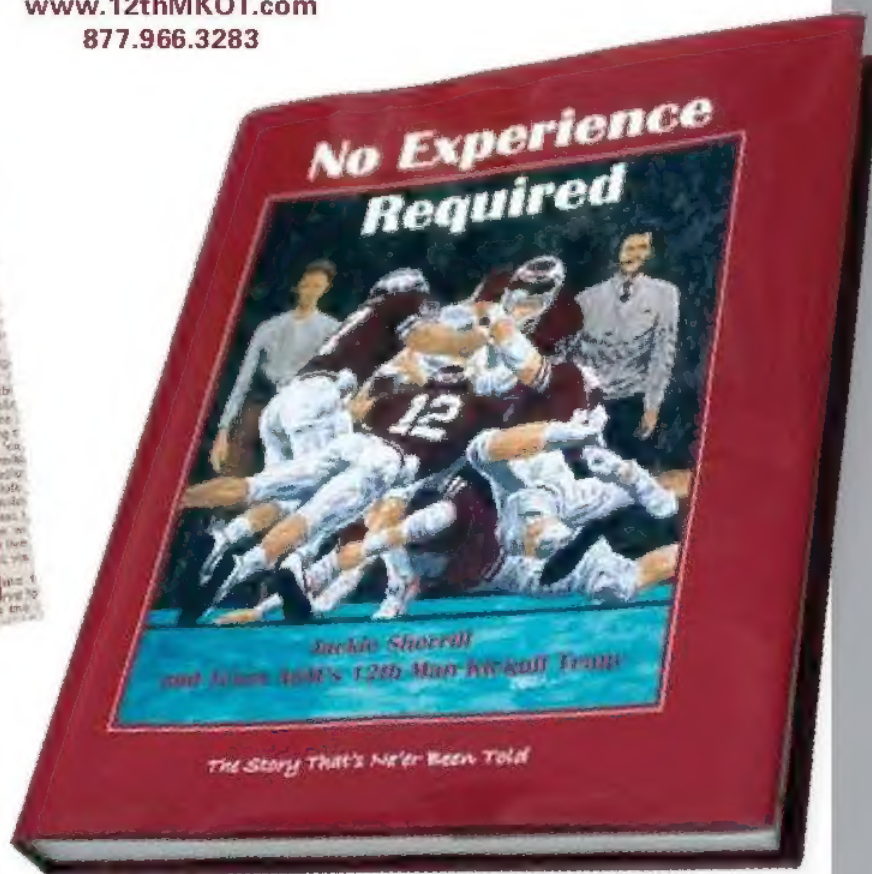
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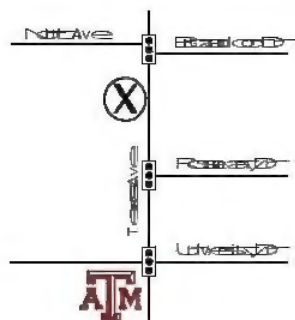
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Do you recognize the above photo from campus? Send an e-mail to photo@aggiemag.com and let us know where it was taken. Be the first to get it right and we'll send you a free copy of the book *Standing for America: The Spirit of Kyle Field*. Look for the answer in the next issue of *AI*. Congratulations to Debra Reiley for being the first to guess the photo in the June/July 09 issue – the pond behind the George Bush Library.

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Jeremy '04, Brian '01, Jason '01 and Rob '88 with Acie Law IV at the first annual Acie Law Foundation golf tournament. The AI staff didn't quite bring home any trophies (apparently most lost balls isn't prize-worthy), but it was a blast to be able to play in. If you're going to be in the DFW area for the Arkansas game, sign up for the Northeast Tarrant County Aggie Mom's 5th Annual Scholarship Golf Scramble on that Friday. Hope to see you there!

Howdy!

The summer is flying by fast and before we know it, the Texas A&M football team will be taking the field to kickoff the 2009 season. As usual, it can't get here fast enough for me.

Here at AI, we're still an issue away from producing our football preview. Like most things, we like to wait until the last minute, but in this case it's to see how the Ags look in fall practice. And entering the second year of head coach Mike Sherman's tenure, there are many questions to be answered when the players start putting on the pads.

Will Jerrod Johnson solidify the starting job at quarterback? If so, where and how much does Ryan Tannehill contribute? Can Lucas Patterson make a successful move to offensive line? Who will step up to fill holes at key positions on both sides of the ball? Which true freshmen will provide an instant impact this year?

While those questions and more will be answered in the coming weeks, we decided to tackle that last one in this issue with our top 10 true freshmen to watch this fall (page 20). Many of them have already generated a lot of buzz during voluntary workouts this summer.

Also in this issue, you will find our top 12 stories of 2008-09 (page 17), AI's Sportsperson of the Year (page 25) and a Wii baseball game featuring A&M baseball and softball players (page 14).

Last but not least, congratulations to Pat Henry and the men's and women's track and field teams. We just missed covering their national championships in our previous issue, so you can find them on pages 8 and 12.

Gig'em Ags, football season is almost here!

Brian '01

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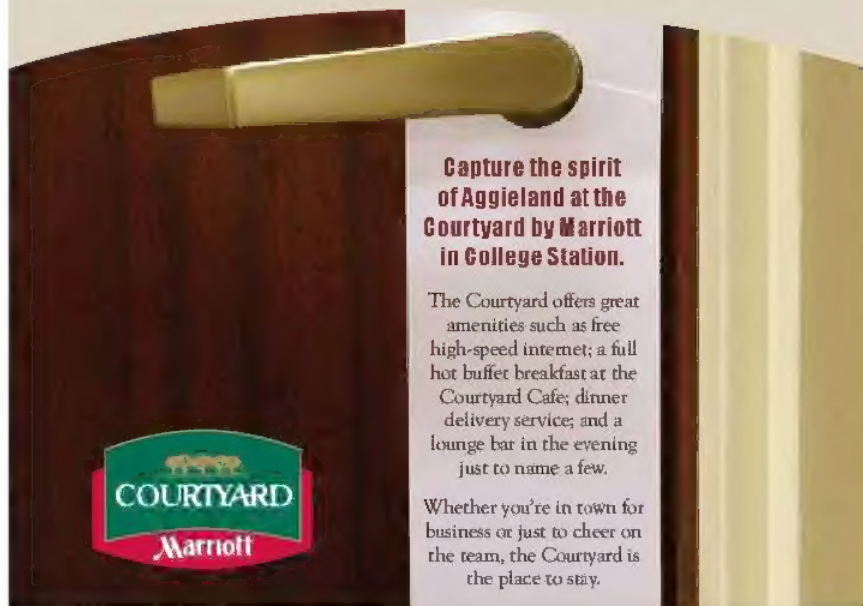
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UCS M⁴. TRACK & FIELD UCS

in the clear

Texas A&M sophomore Gabby Mayo competes in the 100 meter hurdles at the NCAA Outdoor Championships in June. The Aggies claimed the men's and women's team titles – the first school to win both since LSU in 1990 with current A&M head coach Pat Henry at the helm.
Photo by Errol Anderson.



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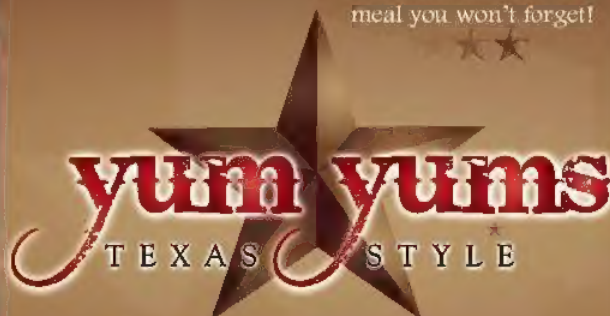
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the return of LINEBACKER U?

BY JEREMY KSIONDA '04

Well to be honest we were not quite sure what angle to take with recruiting in this issue. We covered defense last time and offense two issues ago. There was the State 7 on 7 tournament, and while action packed, it didn't exactly have the flare we were looking for. Then it hit us. Actually, it hit everyone, because when the news broke that nationally ranked linebacker Corey Nelson committed to Texas A&M in mid-July, it sent shockwaves across the entire nation.

Over the past several years, Aggie signing day hauls have been highlighted by offensive players such as Michael Goodson, Martellus Bennett, Stephen McGee and Jeff Fuller. And while a few highly touted defenders have signed with A&M over the same timeframe, none have come with more accolades than Nelson.

Standing, 6-1 and weighing in at around 210 pounds, Nelson is an absolute terror on the football field. In his junior season alone, Nelson tallied 156 tackles, 19 tackles for loss, 12 sacks, 5 forced fumbles, 3 recovered fumbles and broke up 4 passes. Want more? How about the 9 blocked punts as a junior as well?

Nelson's impressive junior campaign earned him First Team All-District, All-Area, and All-State honors as he helped lead Dallas Skyline deep into the 5A state playoffs.

Billy Liucci of the *Maroon & White Report* at TexAgs.com describes Nelson as a true sideline-to-sideline linebacker who excels in all phases of the game.

"He has enough raw speed to chase down ball-carriers from behind, is outstanding in coverage, can stuff the run and is a gifted pass-rusher," Liucci says. "His ability to move laterally and explode into opposing backs and receivers are natural traits that you don't see in too many high school linebacker recruits. He has the kind of 'burst' that all of the great ones possess. I saw it in past A&M greats like William Thomas, Dat Nguyen and Reggie Brown, I saw it in Lone Star legends Derek Johnson and Zach Thomas and I see it in Nelson. In other words, he is today's prototype Big 12 linebacker because players like Nelson are exactly what it takes to successfully defend the league's high-powered spread offenses."

Nelson joins fellow Skyline linebacker Domonique Patterson as the second Aggie linebacker pledge in the class of 2010. According to Patterson, Nelson's commitment didn't come as a surprise to him.

"I knew he was going to do it," Patterson said to the *Maroon & White Report*. "That's Corey. I knew the whole time that A&M was going to be his number one choice so I'm not really surprised. We've always talked about playing together in college and



it was the plan, so now it's official. Corey and I are best friends and we're always laughing, playing and goofing around, but once we get on the field we get really serious. For us to play together again at Texas A&M, that's going to add more chemistry to the team and add more fuel to the fire. That makes me feel really good. I'm looking forward to playing with Corey by my side on the field in college. It's a dream come true."

It should be a dream come true for Aggie fans, as well. Turning down the likes of Texas, Oklahoma, LSU and USC to play for the Aggies, Nelson could be the first of a few remaining very special dominoes to fall. Getting a high-profile player like Nelson to join the fold and publicly acknowledge his belief that your program will turn around is exactly the type of momentum Mike Sherman and the Aggie coaching staff need to finish out the 2010 recruiting class with a bang. ■

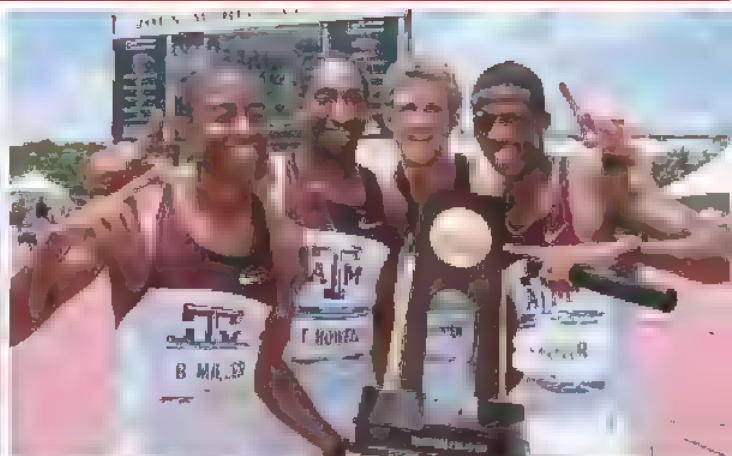
For complete coverage of Texas A&M recruiting, contact Billy Liucci of the *Maroon & White Report* at (979) 590-7361 or by visiting www.texags.com

Men (12) De'Lon Isom, Chris Dykes, Zuheir Sharif, Tran Howell and Kyle Dykhuizen

Women (11) Yasmine Regis, Ali, son George, Sandy Wooten, Ashika Charan, Gabby Mayo and Dominique Duncan



The Texas A&M men and women each captured national titles in dramatic fashion during the NCAA Outdoor Championships in June. In the men's final race, senior Justin Oliver delivered the anchor leg of his career in placing second for eight points that moved A&M into the title position. "We're the national champions," Oliver declared. "Texas A&M, no one else. That's all I could say when I finished the race. We did it! We did it!" The key women's points arrived in the triple jump from senior Yasmine Regis, the final event involving the Aggies. "This is a special championship for us," Aggie head coach Pat Henry said. "This is our first graduating class. We're extremely pleased. This is a very gratifying pair of championships for this team." In winning the first ever NCAA Championships for the Texas A&M track and field program, Henry achieves his 28th and 29th national titles on the Division I level.



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Denny Clement, Zach Luther and Scott Arthur take on Holly Ridley, Andrea Tovar and Bailey Schroeder in a baseball vs. softball Wii baseball challenge BY ALL STAFF



12 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE WII COMPETITORS

When **Denny** was little, he wanted to be a **fireman** when he grew up.

If **Zach** could play another college sport, he would be a **point guard** on the Aggie basketball team.

When he goes on the road, **Scott** has to bring **Q-tips** for when he gets out of the shower or he will go crazy.

Bailey's idea for a good date in Bryan/College Station is dinner at Café Eccell and **bowling**.

Even though it's a little mushy, **Andrea's** favorite tradition is the **Century Tree**.

Holly would like to meet **Oprah** or **Ellen**.

Denny's favorite tradition is **section 203** the student section at Olsen Field.

Scott would like to meet Jessica Simpson from about five years ago - from the **Daisy Duke** era.

When she was little, **Bailey** wanted to play in the **WNBA** when she grew up.

Andrea's favorite **TV shows** are Reba, Greek and The Secret Life of an American Teenager.

If **Zach** had a million dollars, he would buy his dad a **classic Chevy** truck.

Holly can touch her **tongue** to her nose 



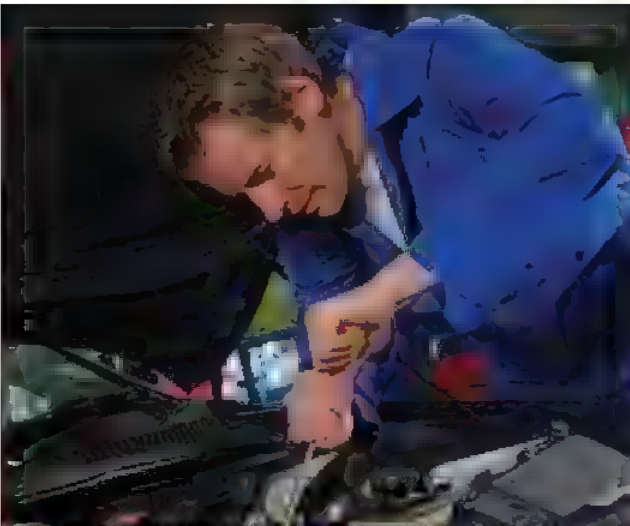
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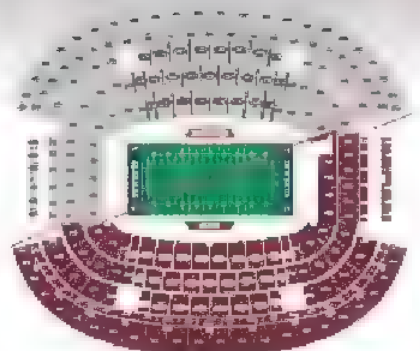
When Texas A&M meets Arkansas on Oct. 3, 2009 in Arlington, it will mark the renewal of an intense and entertaining rivalry that has been dormant for the past 18 years. The two former Southwest Conference foes have not played since the Aggies upended the Razorbacks, 13-3, in 1991.

Inaugural Game tickets starting at \$85.



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top 72 STORIES

Looking back on Texas A&M athletic stories of 2009, we give our picks for the big

THREE CHAMPIONSHIPS IN TWO WEEKS

In a span of two unforgettable weeks in late May/early June, Texas A&M claimed three national championships in dramatic fashion, ending a 30-year Aggie drought of NCAA titles in any sport along the way. The men's golf team struck first, winning the program's first-ever national title behind one of the most clutch performances in school history by senior Bronson Burgoon. The men's and women's track and field teams followed up with amazing performances of their own two weeks later at the NCAA Outdoor Championships, claiming the first-ever titles for both programs. With three NCAA national championships, Texas A&M won more this past year than any other school.

MEN'S BASKETBALL RISES TO THE CHALLENGE

Fresh off a demoralizing loss to Baylor in Waco, the men's basketball team was staring at a 3-7 conference record, while their postseason dreams were in serious jeopardy. But starting with a dominating home victory over archrival Texas two days later, the Aggies put together a remarkable six-game winning streak to close out conference play. The Ags ended the regular season with a statement win over No. 12 Missouri on senior night that essentially cemented A&M a spot in the Big Dance.

STEPHEN MCGEE DRAFTED BY THE COWBOYS

Throughout his college career, Stephen McGee was the definitive leader on the football field and the ultimate representative of Texas A&M University off the field. Entering his final season in maroon and white, excitement was at an all-time high to see how the senior quarterback would fare in Mike Sherman's pro-style offense. Unfortunately, an injury-plagued season prevented McGee from showcasing his talents. While his A&M career had plenty of ups and downs, the ending was a dream come true for McGee when the Dallas Cowboy's selected him in the fourth round of the NFL Draft — only the second time America's team has drafted a quarterback since 1991.

STORMING THE COURT IN WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

Takia Starks watched crowds rush the court after big wins by the men's team and dreamed it would happen at a women's game. She made the dream a reality in a showdown against No. 2 Oklahoma, sinking a game-winning layup with 6 seconds left to end the Sooners' 20-game winning streak. It was the highest-ranked team A&M has ever beaten. After the buzzer sounded, the majority of the crowd of 7,035 stormed the court to celebrate with the Aggies as the Sooners walked off hanging their heads in defeat.



BASEBALL BEGINS SEASON RANKED NO. 1

For the first time in program history, Texas A&M opened the season as the top-ranked team in college baseball. Baseball America magazine selected the Aggies as its preseason No. 1 team. Needless to say, expectations were high for the Ags to reach the College World Series and challenge for the national championship. Unfortunately, it was LSU, No. 2 in that preseason poll, who ultimately claimed the baseball national championship, while the Aggies' season ended in the Fort Worth Regionals.

JOSH CARTER'S RECORD-SETTING CAREER COMES TO AN END

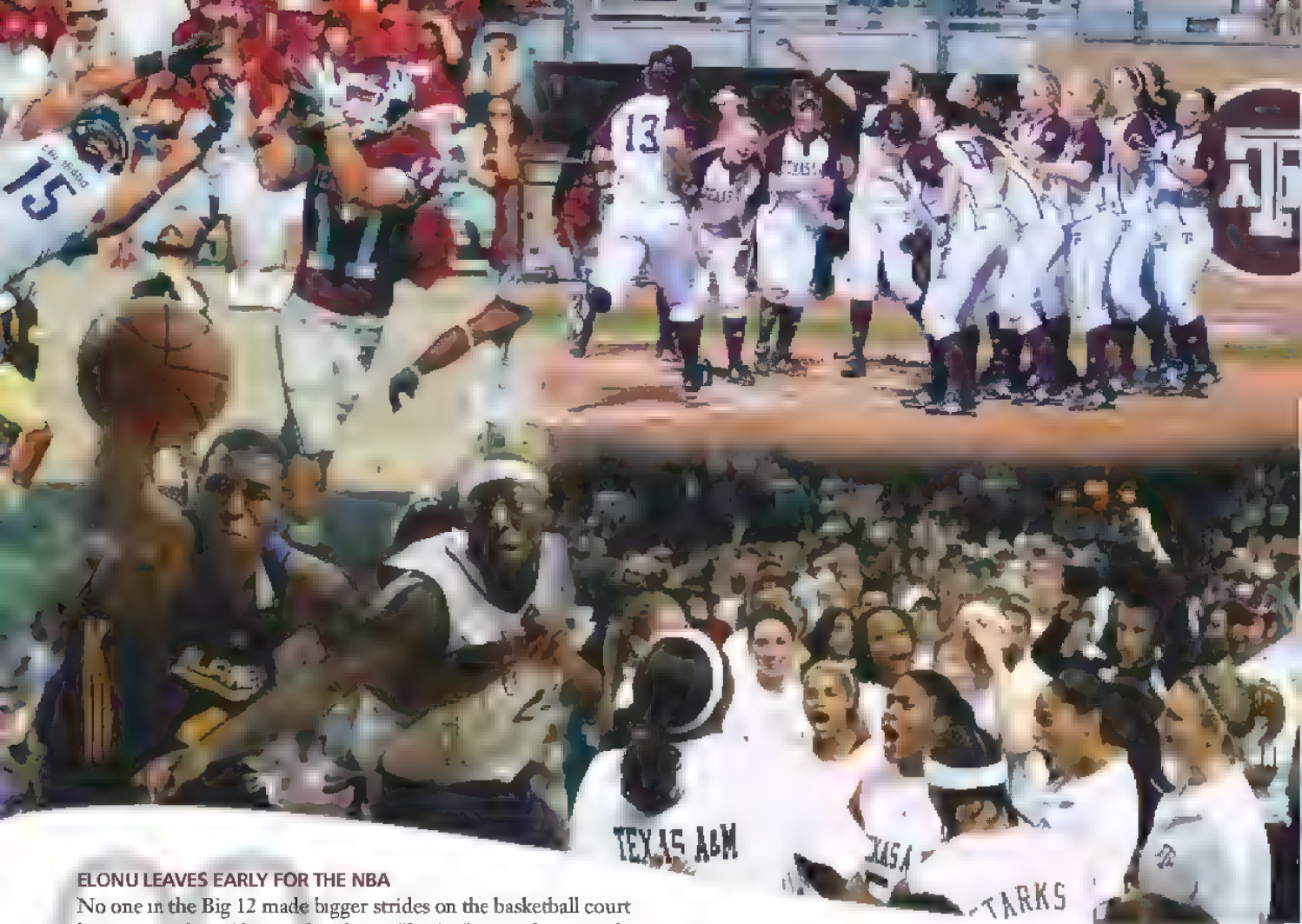
Josh Carter enjoyed a record-setting career in Aggeland and was an integral part in the resurrection of the A&M basketball program. An All-Big 12 selection, Carter became the winningest player in school history this season as well as the first Aggie to play in four NCAA tournaments. He is the only player in school history to score at least 1,500 career points with 500 rebounds and 200 assists. His 299 career three-pointers are also a school record and rank fourth in Big 12 history. Perhaps the biggest highlight of his career came last season in a must-win game against Nebraska. Carter sank the game-winning three-pointer and was mauled by his teammates at half court.

SOCCER REACHES THE ELITE EIGHT

This past season, the A&M soccer program showed that it should never be taken lightly—even during a “rebuilding year.” The Aggies’ streak of four consecutive Big 12 titles did come to an end—barely—but an amazing run in the NCAA tournament followed. For only the fourth time in program history, the Aggies reached the Elite Eight. Their season ended after a double overtime loss to the eventual national champion, North Carolina, and the Ags finished their rebuilding year ranked No. 7 in the nation.

FOOTBALL RECORDS FALL

Overall, the 2008 football season was a disappointment, but there were plenty of bright spots along the way. Namely the record-setting performances of backup quarterback turned starter Jerrod Johnson, backup quarterback turned wide receiver Ryan Tannehill and high school star turned college star wide receiver Jeff Fuller. After stepping in for much of the season for the injured Stephen McGee, Johnson led the Aggie offense to prolific numbers, setting the school record for touchdown passes in a season (21) and yards in a game (419 against Kansas State). To help the team, Tannehill changed positions and led the team with 55 receptions for 844 yards (both freshmen school records). And Fuller showed why he was so highly recruited, grabbing 50 receptions for 630 yards and a school-record 9 touchdowns.



ELONU LEAVES EARLY FOR THE NBA

No one in the Big 12 made bigger strides on the basketball court last season than Chinemelu Elonu. "Junior" went from rarely used reserve the previous year to one of the most dominating big men in the conference. Along with fellow juniors Donald Sloan and Bryan Davis, Elonu declared for the NBA Draft after the season. However, most outside the program expected all three players to withdraw their names before the draft deadline and return for their senior seasons. Davis and Sloan did just that, but Elonu shocked Aggieland by forgoing his final season in maroon and white and remaining in the draft. It proved to be a good decision when the Los Angeles Lakers selected Elonu in the second round. With his selection, A&M became the only Big 12 school to have a player drafted in each of the last three years. An Aggie has been chosen in four of the last five NBA Drafts.

EQUESTRIAN CLAIMS WESTERN NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

The western half of the Texas A&M equestrian team beat defending national champion Texas Christian, 7-1, to win the 2009 Varsity Equestrian National Championship (VENC) in western riding for the second time in three years. A&M joins Oklahoma State as the only three-time western champions in the eight-year history of the VENC, having now won the title in each of the last three odd numbered years (2005, 2007, 2009). The title marks the seventh national team championship of any kind won by the equestrian team in its 10-year existence at the varsity level. In addition to helping claim the team title, Caroline Gunn successfully defended her inaugural individual national championship in horsemanship.

AGGIES KEEP LONE STAR SHOWDOWN TROPHY

After losing the Lone Star Showdown title during the first three years of its existence, Texas A&M claimed the trophy from the Longhorns following the 2007-2008 season. Through last February, it looked as if Texas would reclaim the title at the end of the season. The Aggies stormed back, however, claiming 5.5 of the final 6.5 points. The final score was a tie at 9.5, and in this case, tie goes to the previous winner - Texas A&M. It may not be the ideal way to win the competition, but it definitely beats losing it to your archrival.

SOFTBALL CLAIMS SERIES WIN OVER ARIZONA

The Arizona Wildcats, one of the most storied programs in college softball, made their first-ever visit to Aggieland this season for a three game series. In the first game, the No. 21 Aggies upset the 10th-ranked Wildcats in dramatic fashion, coming back from a three-run deficit to tie the game in the sixth inning before winning on senior Holly Ridley's walk-off homerun in the bottom of the ninth. Arizona bounced back to even the series by taking game two, 9-4. In the final game, A&M rallied back from another three-run deficit to clinch the series win with a 5-4, eight-inning victory over the Wildcats. The Aggies used a three-run seventh inning to extend the game into extra innings, and scored the game-winning run in the bottom of the eighth to upset Arizona again. **BY**



Steven Terrill

Stephen Barrera

Making Their Mark

The top ten true freshmen to watch for in 2009

BY JEREMY KS ONDA '04

Unfortunately, we're still a full issue away from our official football preview issue, but we just can't help it. We simply have to take a sneak-peek into what's in store for this season. And what better way to dive in than doing some summer speculating on the type of impact the true freshmen will have on this year's Aggie football team? After all, Jeff Fuller, Cyrus Gray, Tony Jerod-Eddie, Trent Hunter and Terrence Frederick all played their way into starting roles last year, and by all accounts, an ample amount of playing time is up for grabs this fall. We're certain to leave a player or three off the list, but that's what makes this game all the more fun. Here are our top ten true freshmen to watch in 2009, in no particular order.

CHRISTINE MICHAEL

This one's a no-brainer. Even the casual A&M fan knows to be on the lookout for the five star talent from Beaumont. The real story here is that Michael enrolled in summer session and immediately turned heads with his strength and work-ethic. When you combine God-given talent with a hard worker, it's usually a recipe for a very special football player.

JONATHAN STEWART

The most highly touted defender in the class, it's natural to expect big things from Stewart. The rangy linebacker with excellent instincts will have every opportunity to step into a starting position early on this season. Still, asking a true freshman to contain the explosive offenses of the Big 12 is a lot to expect. He'll have some bumps and bruises along the way, but Stewart is certainly capable of elevating the overall play of the Aggie defense.

BRANDAL JACKSON

This was a fun pick for us. Everyone we talked to who has seen Jackson play swears up and down that he'll be a difference maker for the Aggies. After seeing

him in person, we have to agree. Jackson is such a natural at wide receiver, runs great routes, has soft hands and has the ability to leap through the ceiling. You name it, he can do it.

RYAN SWOPE

Just another do-it-all athlete from one of Texas' top high school football programs with an outstanding winning tradition. Sound familiar? It should. It's the same formula Mike Sherman used to select Hunter and Frederick from Katy two years ago, and he's done it again with Swope. Whether it's at running back, wide receiver or in the return game, we expect Swope to make as much of an impression on offense as the Katy duo did on defense last season.

HUTSON PRIOLEAU

Considering the depth chart at tight end, Prioleau is on this list partially out of necessity. It's almost always difficult for a prospect from among the private school ranks to make a difference right away, but Prioleau has the measurables and work ethic to beat the norm. If he's able to make a smooth transition to Big 12 football, Prioleau could be a valuable weapon for the Aggie offense this season.

STEVEN TERRELL

Again, we're looking at depth here and the Aggies are desperately thin at the cornerback position. The only question mark surrounding Terrell is the fact that he primarily played safety in the high school ranks. Still, he's a natural in the defensive backfield and a leader to boot. His outstanding defensive play was crucial in Allen's 5A state championship last season. The Aggies will look for more of the same from him in 2009.

STEPHEN BARRERA

Alright, now we're just starting to sound like a broken record. Depth, depth and depth. The Aggies are short on it all

over the field, and these freshmen will be counted on to make up for it. And none could be counted on more than Barrera. The massive offensive lineman with a great wing span and quick feet will push veterans from the word "go" this fall.

RYAN EPPERSON

It's not every day you see a punter on a top ten list. But when you've got a school like Texas A&M that's been able to depend on the reliable legs of Shane Lechler and Justin Brantly for nearly a decade, any question marks or uncertainties at the position become highlighted. The last addition to Sherman's 2009 recruiting class, Epperson has some big shoes to fill as soon as he takes the field.

DUSTIN HARRIS

Harris was on our watch list to begin with, but after his MVP performance in the Texas High School Coaches Association All-Star game in late July, expectations are higher than ever for the Livingston standout. In the All-Star game, Harris tallied an interception, threw a 35-yard pass on a trick play, returned a kickoff 98 yards for a touchdown, returned a fumble 95 yards for a touchdown and returned a punt for a touchdown that was called back on a penalty. Simply put, Harris was absolutely electric that evening, leaving Aggie fans salivating for more this fall.

ANDREW WEAVER

Last but not least, we really think Weaver could make a splash this season. Like Hunter and Frederick a year before, Weaver wasn't the most highly sought after recruit (although the Ags did have to fend off Texas Tech and Oklahoma State to obtain his signature). Weaver's flash off the edge and combination of size and speed make him an ideal candidate for the new Jack position. Other than Von Miller, no one on the Aggie roster stood out at the Jack, leaving the door wide open for Weaver to step in. ■

"To drive down, get the winning score and beat Texas for the first time in a lot of years at that place was really special."

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? CODY WALLACE

BY STEVE HUNT



For three and a half seasons at Texas A&M, Cody Wallace was a rock on the Aggie offensive line. After redshirting in 2003, Wallace developed into a second-team all-conference performer at center as a junior and finished his career as a First Team All-Big 12 Conference player.

"I look back on my time in Aggieland and it was a lot of fun," he said. "I really enjoyed being there and I made a lot of good friends. It was a great place to be a part of the college experience."

As a junior, Wallace was front and center as the Aggies handed archrival Texas a loss in Austin.

"I remember the last drive of the game specifically because all of us were close as a team, especially the o-line," he said. "To drive down, get the winning score and beat Texas for the first time in a lot of years at that place was really special."

After the Aggies' loss to Penn State in the 2007 Alamo Bowl, Wallace's college career was over and it was time to prepare for the NFL Draft. That included trips to

the league's annual Scouting Combine in Indianapolis and to Mobile, Alabama for the Senior Bowl. It was in Mobile that he first met then-San Francisco head coach Mike Nolan.

When it came time for the draft, Wallace had no indication of where he might end up. However, he must have made a lasting impression on Nolan, because the 49ers snatched him up in the fourth round (107th overall).

"Not necessarily that we needed a center," Nolan said at the time, "but we wanted the best player on the board. We were pleased he was there at our fourth pick, and we got him."

Wallace was surprised and excited for the opportunity. He signed a four-year contract with the team on July 23.

From the first time he walked through the doors of the Niners' training facility in Santa Clara, he realized that playing in the NFL offered a completely different dynamic than what he was used to.

"There is so much more at this level as far as technique and everything," Wallace said. "The playbook obviously has a lot more stuff to learn. Since everybody here is really talented, the only thing that gives you an advantage is your technique. Just being here and having the players and coaches help me out with that has really helped me. I really pay attention to things like where you put your hands because you can't beat someone on athleticism. I try to stay in front of them because everybody here is quick. That's probably been the biggest change."

He also quickly understood the one thing every successful NFL o-lineman has to have.

"You've got to be tough," Wallace said. "You've got to be able to go out there and grind for 17 weeks. It's a lot of banging and everything that beats on your body, but you've just got to push through it."

After a 2-5 start to the 2008 season, Nolan was fired and replaced by Mike Singletary, who finished 5-4 and became the official head coach following the season. Wallace was declared inactive for the season, but will likely see some playing time this year for the rebuilding 49ers. **AM**

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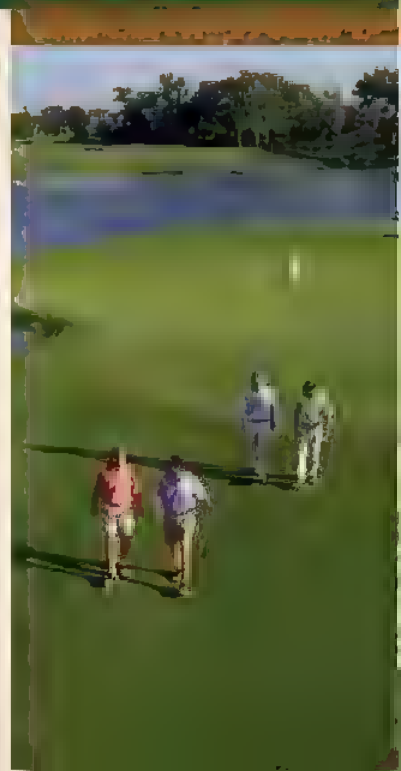
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AI's Sportsperson of the Year **Bronson** **BURGOON**

BY JASON MCCONNELL '01

When discussing our "Sportsperson of the Year," the AI staff tossed around several of the names I'm sure you can think of... Stephen McGee (for his leadership on the football field over the last four years), Brooks Raley (an amazing everyday player on the mound, in the outfield and at the plate) and Josh Carter (the winningest basketball player in A&M history). Coach Pat Henry and his two national championships also made the short list.

But this year, no one had more of an impact on his (or her) team... while igniting the athletic department as a whole... than Bronson Burgoon.

Ever since he arrived on campus four years ago, Burgoon has made an impact on the Aggie golf team. His first year, he enjoyed the best freshman season in A&M history and led the team in scoring. His sophomore year, he again led the team in stroke average and was named a third-team All American. And even though he sat out the fall semester his junior year to concentrate on school, he was still named to the PING all-region team for

the third straight year.

But his greatest contribution came on the 18th hole at Inverness Golf Club on the final day of the 2009 national championships.

A&M, ranked No. 7 entering the match play tournament, faced No. 4 Arkansas in the championship round. Junior Andrea Pavan and Sophomore John Hurley posted two quick wins and the Aggies were in great shape to claim the title. The series tightened up, however, with back-to-back losses by Sophomore Conrad Shindler and Senior Matt Van Zandt. It all came down to the final match between Burgoon and the Razorbacks' Andrew Landry.

Through 13 holes, Burgoon was up by four and seemed to have the victory in the bag. However, a few errant shots and near perfect golf by Landry ate away at the lead, swinging all of the momentum along the way.

"That was the hardest thing when it was slipping away," Burgoon admitted. "I was more discouraged for the guys on the team than for myself."

But this is where he wanted to be... on 18 with a chance to win the national championship. And his head coach agreed.

"I wouldn't rather have anybody else playing this hole than you right now even after losing four straight," coach J.T. Higgins said to Burgoon on 18.

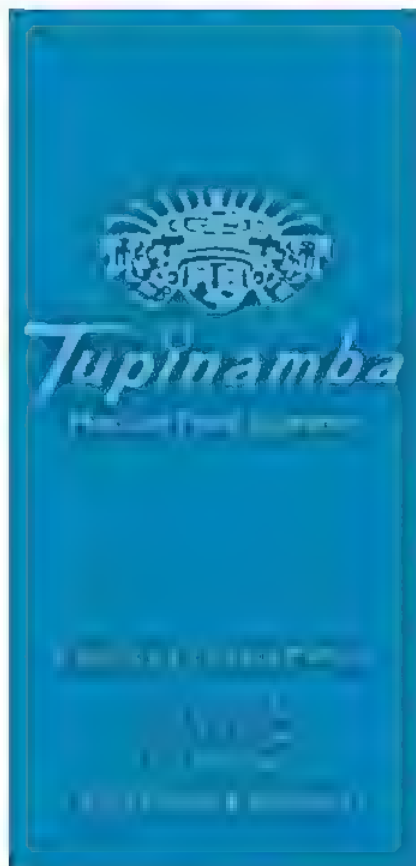
It didn't look good for the Ags when Burgoon sent his 18th hole tee shot right to the deep rough while Landry was in the middle of the fairway. Landry added some pressure by hitting a wedge on the first cut on the green, about 35 feet from the hole.

The next moment is what Aggies everywhere will never forget... an amazing, 125-yard gap wedge from the rough to within three inches of the hole. A shot that many called one of the best in college golf history.

Landry conceded the birdie putt. Aggies everywhere watched as he attempted a tough putt to try and tie the match, but it wasn't meant to be. The Aggie golfers... led by Burgoon... had won the national championship... the first NCAA championship in any sport at A&M in over 30 years.

"I couldn't have drawn it up any better," AI's Sportsperson of the Year said. "I love this team." ■





the **12th**man



When Leo Goertz arrived at Texas A&M in 1978, he came to do more than just study. He came to take care of one of the most important things in Aggie athletics—the fields.

Following in his brother's footsteps, Goertz made his way to Texas A&M to get a college education. He became a student field manager during his first semester and he hasn't left since. Of course, his paycheck has grown a little from the \$4.35 an hour he was earning then.

Goertz started out working at Olsen Field and was there to see it in all of its glory the first full year it was open. Eventually his duties grew. In 1986, track fields were added and the softball field came a few years later. In 1996, he took Kyle Field under his wing when the field went from Astroturf to grass.

When Kyle Field is seen on national television, it's Goertz's "artwork" that is being showcased.

"You look at the fields as a canvas, and you're the painter," Goertz said.

And a masterpiece is what he gets at the end of a long, hard day at work. The intricate checkers mowed into the grass of the baseball fields and the perfectly straight lines painted onto Kyle Field is all the handwork of Goertz and his crew.

Goertz didn't expect to stay at Texas A&M for more than 30 years, or that he would be in charge of managing the 15 acres of natural grass that makes up all the athletics fields of this university. Nonetheless, he doesn't regret a thing.

"I don't think I'd trade any of this for anything else in the world," he said. "It's been a perfect fit all along."

Growing up on a farm in New Braunfels, he always loved being outdoors. So, it's no wonder that Goertz feels right at home doing what he does today.

After coming to Texas A&M, Goertz gradually made his way up the ladder. During his time as a student, he made contacts and developed a friendship with Pat Olsen. And it was Olsen who helped to get him a permanent job when it came time to walk across the stage.

It's no easy task to keep all the fields in pristine condition. Millions of people see the outcome of his work every year, and that's a tough challenge to keep spectators happy with how things look.

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression," Goertz adds. "You never know who's looking."

That is why he strives to keep all of the fields looking as immaculate as possible every time the players hit the field. He

"I don't think I'd trade any of this for anything else in the world. It's been a perfect fit all along."

watches the weather channel like some people watch soap operas so that he knows if he needs to paint the field or put a tarp on it.

"One of the unique things about this situation is to see an 18-year-old athlete come in and develop and potentially become a professional athlete," Goertz adds.

Some of his former field staff have learned from Goertz and gone on to grow their professional careers in the business at places such as Dodger Stadium, Georgia Tech and Frisco Pizza Hut Park.

Goertz credits the student workers who have come and gone through the years as vital to helping him.

"I couldn't do this without those guys," he adds.

Today, Goertz works with several student workers and three full-time employees.

"What's a really big kicker aspect of this job is that at the end of the day when you get off that mower, you can turn around and see what you have accomplished," he admits.

And despite all the hard work that goes into creating this artwork every day, Goertz doesn't want to take all the credit.

"It's not a hard thing to do," he said. "Mama Nature does most of the work. We just help her along." ■

Editor's Note: See another photo of Leo Goertz on page 30.

LEO'S TOP FIVE MOMENTS

- » The 1989 baseball team's 26 weeks ranked No. 1 in the nation
- » The 1993 baseball team's trip to the College World Series
- » The red and white baseball game
- » The A&M vs. Texas football game after Bonfire fest
- » Texas A&M's baseball game against the Astros at Olsen Field in 1986

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COMING BACK HOME

BY KATE MCCONNELL '09

My husband, Jason, has been eating at Chicken Express for years. Over the course of our relationship, he has raved about it — everything from the food to the service to the people, he loves it. I, however, had never been much of a “go out to get it” fried chicken kind of person. Well, it took one trip to Chicken Express and that changed. Beyond the tasty food, what’s my favorite part? The family-like atmosphere, an element that Clayton and Jana Rhoades have nurtured from the beginning.

A FATEFUL VISIT

It seems as though Clayton '94 and Jana '97 were destined to be a part of the Chicken Express family. As a child, Clayton and his sister created a makeshift restaurant in their playroom complete with a drive through window. Clayton was even a part of a restaurant association as a kid. Jana, meanwhile, happened to grow up with the owners of the Chicken Express franchise.

Destiny continued when, as a freshmen at A&M, Clayton's friends — who happened to be from Jana's hometown of Mineral Wells — always talked about how much College Station needed a Chicken Express. Shortly thereafter, Clayton and Jana began dating.

During a visit to Jana's parent's home, Clayton had his first taste of the fried chicken that would later become his livelihood. “This stuff is amazing,” he said at the time, “We definitely need one of these in College Station!”

JOURNEY TO AGGIELAND

Clayton, originally an architect, always knew he wanted to do something creative. But he never thought that he would find his creative outlet in good fried chicken with a side of okra. AggIELand, on the other hand, was somewhere he always knew he belonged. Having grown up in Taylor (just outside of Austin), Clayton admits it was tough growing up an Aggie fan in the Austin area but, they were always Aggie fans. He especially remembers coming to College Station with his family for football games.

“We'd sit in the third deck on the end and cheer on the team the whole family was there. It was an amazing experience.”

And when it became time for college, Clayton applied to one school — A&M.

Like Clayton, Jana never suspected she'd find her life's work in a restaurant having gone to school to become a teacher. She, however, didn't always imagine herself in the heart of AggIELand.

Jana started at TCU, and when she wanted to transfer to Texas Tech her sophomore year, her parents agreed only on one condition. Jana had to live in College Station the summer before transferring to Tech. Her parents knew full well that once she got a taste of AggIELand, she wouldn't want to leave. After that initial summer, Jana decided that she was going to forget the idea of transferring and was staying put.

JOINING THE FRANCHISE

After getting married, Jana started her career as a teacher, while spending her summers working at Chicken Express. After only a couple of summers, Clayton and Jana knew it was a company they wanted to do more with in the future. In 2001, the young couple left their home and careers in Dallas and moved back to AggIELand to open their first Chicken Express location.

“At the first Chamber event, they played the Aggie War Hymn,” Jana recalls. “I looked at Clayton and said, ‘Ahhh. We're home.’ It just felt right. I wouldn't live anywhere else. We hit the jackpot moving to College Station.”

Clayton knew the significance of starting a business that was Aggie Owned & Operated, and he made sure it was apparent when passersby saw the Chicken Express sign.

“As a student, that's where you always wanted to go,” Clayton said. “Everybody supported Aggie Owned and Operated.”

When they first joined the Chicken Express franchise, there were only 35 locations. Now there are 135, four of which are owned by Clayton and Jana. Not only have they helped to expand Chicken Express in central Texas, they have also been voted the area's “Best Chicken” for three years and counting.

TRUE LOYALTY

Clayton and Jana aren't all business. Like many Aggies who still live in the area, their schedule revolves around athletic events.

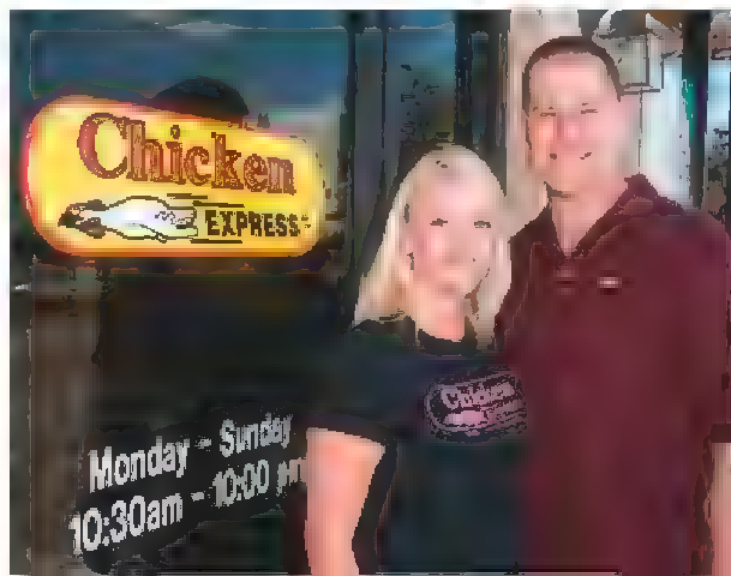
“Nobody plans anything without checking the game schedules first,” Jana admits.

As a couple, Clayton and Jana have always been Aggie enthusiasts. And it is safe to say that eating at Chicken Express has become a part of everyday life for many Aggies.

“We have very loyal customers who you can develop relationships with,” Jana says.

Jason is a perfect example. When he walks in Chicken Express, Clayton has his order ready before he reaches the counter. Beyond that, Clayton sits down and talks with him, getting to know him. This type of service isn't just limited to Jason of course — the Rhoades simply have a heart for the community and treat their customers like family. After all, there aren't many restaurants you can go to and feel as though you're eating at a friend's house.

Be sure to visit our friends Clayton and Jana at one of their two College Station locations (corner of Highway 6 and University or Wellborn near Rock Prairie). ■





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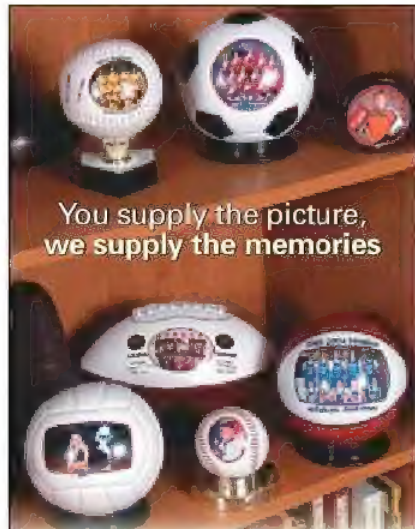


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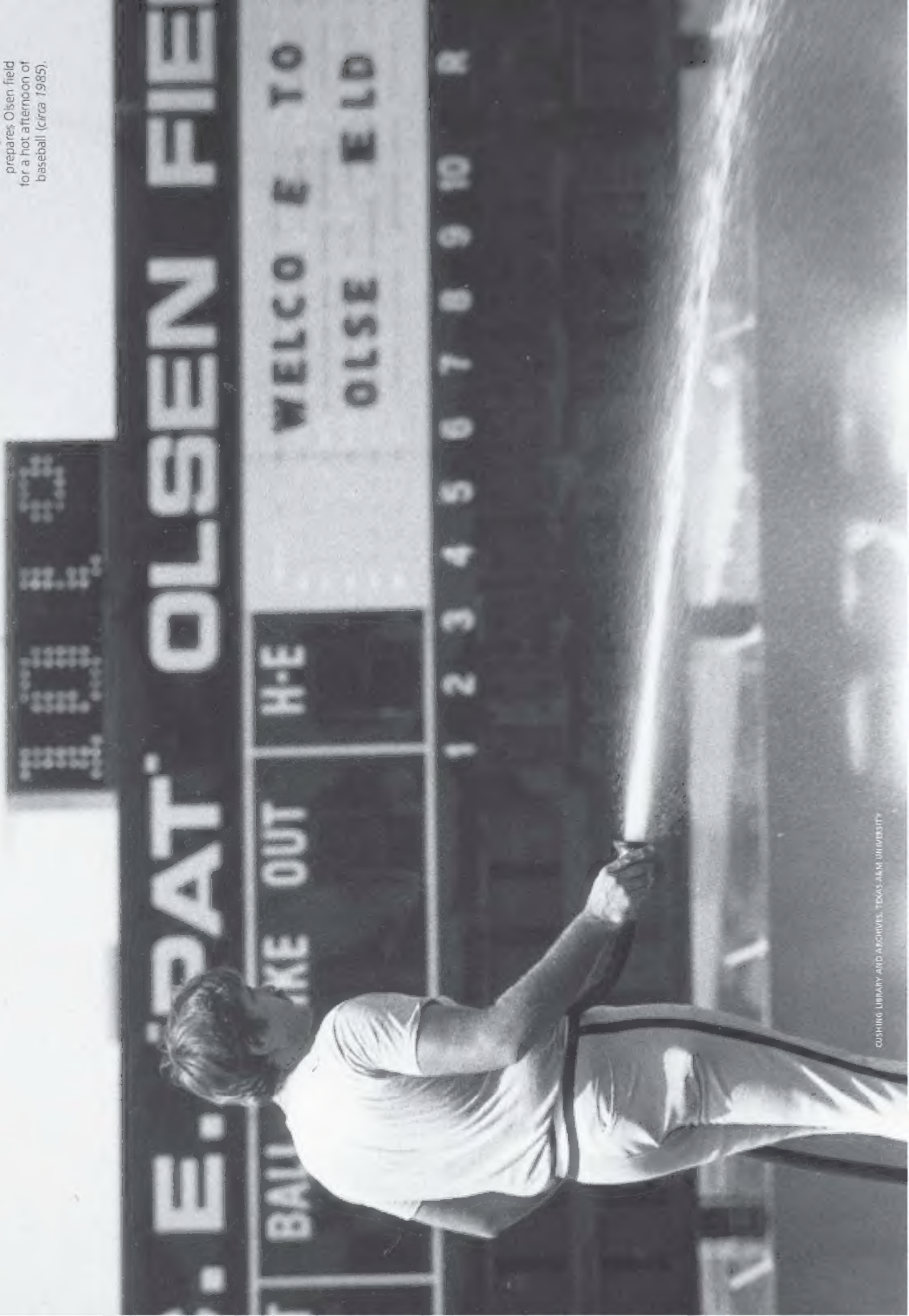
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